

THURSTON COUNTY HISTORICAL JOURNAL

Number 11
April 2020



Do You Remember the Fleetwoods?

World War II on the Homefront

Stormy Behavior Costs Olympia Police Chief, Assistant Chief, Their Jobs

A Windstorm for the Ages

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THURSTON COUNTY HISTORICAL JOURNAL

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The Journal welcomes factual articles dealing with any aspect of Thurston County history. Please contact the editor before submitting an article to determine its suitability for publication. Articles on previously unexplored topics, new interpretations of well-known topics, and personal recollections are preferred. Articles may range in length from 100 words to 10,000 words, and should include source notes and suggested illustrations.

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The Fleetwoods circa 1960. From left to right: Gretchen Christopher, Gary Troxel, and Barbara Ellis. Photo used by permission of Gary Troxel at www.the-fleetwoods.us/photo-gallery.html (accessed September 1, 2019).

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DO YOU REMEMBER THE FLEETWOODS?

James S. Hannum, M.D.

A recent post on the website *ThurstonTalk* reviewed the rich history of musical creativity in the Olympia metropolitan area. Kurt Cobain (the lead singer of the group Nirvana) lived in the apartments at 114 Pear Street between 1989 and 1991. Some of his most noteworthy work was done during those years. Sleater-Kinney, a nationally successful rock band, was formed in the Olympia-Lacey area in 1994. The group took its name from Lacey's Sleater-Kinney Road. Macklemore is the stage name used by rapper Ben Haggerty. He is known to have spent a significant amount of time hanging out in Olympia from 2004 to 2009.¹

However, another group, The Fleetwoods, predates all of those performers. While exploring a West Olympia neighborhood in 2001, I conversed with a man who informed me that Gretchen Christopher lived nearby. At first, I did not recall who she was; the gentleman reminded me that she was one of the original singers in The Fleetwoods, a nationally-known group that had several hit recordings in the late 1950s and early 1960s. I was reminded of that earlier meeting in 2007, while attending a birthday party held for a neighbor, Fred Finn (now a former Democratic member of the Washington House of Representa-

tives). The Fleetwoods provided entertainment for that gathering.

I learned that in 2007, The Fleetwoods differed significantly from the members of the group during its heyday. The 1959 version of The Fleetwoods consisted of Gretchen Christopher, Barbara Ellis, and Gary Troxel. That year, they recorded their first hit record, "Come Softly to Me."²

Troxel was the only member of the original trio who appeared in the performance I enjoyed in 2007. As is the case for many successful groups, a variety of factors gradually led the individual singers to diverging careers. The Fleetwoods' contract with Liberty Records concluded in 1966, and the group chose not to renew it under terms that were less favorable than previous versions.³

For several years after 1966, the performers continued to appear in various combinations including two or three of the original members.⁴ Ellis retired from the group in 1974 and Troxel is said (by Gretchen Christopher's website) to have resigned officially from the group in 1983. In the years that followed, Christopher managed separate groups on the East and West Coasts which she designated as "replacements" for The Fleetwoods.⁵ At



Gary Troxel's group, The Fleetwoods, as it exists in the 21st Century. From left to right: Bonnie Hannukaine, Cheryl Huggins, and Gary Troxel. Photo used by permission of Gary Troxel at www.thefleetwoods.us/photo-gallery.html (accessed September 1, 2019).

the same time, Troxel performed with his own group called The Fleetwoods.⁶ It has been together for about 35 years, and still does shows.

The Fleetwoods should not be confused with Fleetwood Mac, a completely unrelated group. Fleetwood Mac was a rock band formed in London in 1967. Mick Fleetwood was an original member of the group, which eventually became popular in the United States as well as Great Britain.⁷

At least one website perpetuates a question about how the original members of The Fleetwoods chose the name of their group. Did the name memorialize the Cadillac Fleetwood automobile,⁸ or did it come from the designation of Olympia's telephone exchange at the end of the 1950s?⁹ Gary Troxel answered that question in a 2019 email to the author: "It was the Fleetwood exchange word. When we appeared at Parker's Ballroom (our first money-making experience), Bobby Darin thought it came from the Cadillac also, but we set him straight."¹⁰ A similar statement is found in an interview with Gretchen Christopher.¹¹

This leads to the question of how Fleetwood (the first two letters of any exchange were customarily capitalized) was selected as the name for Olympia's telephone exchange. A recently-circulated notion declares that the name was selected to honor a pioneer family in the Lacey-Olympia area.¹² The head of that family was Shadrick Fleetwood. He was born in Jackson County, Indiana circa 1826-



Rotary dial of an Olympia telephone between 1955 and 1961. Image created by the author from a stock photograph in the public domain.

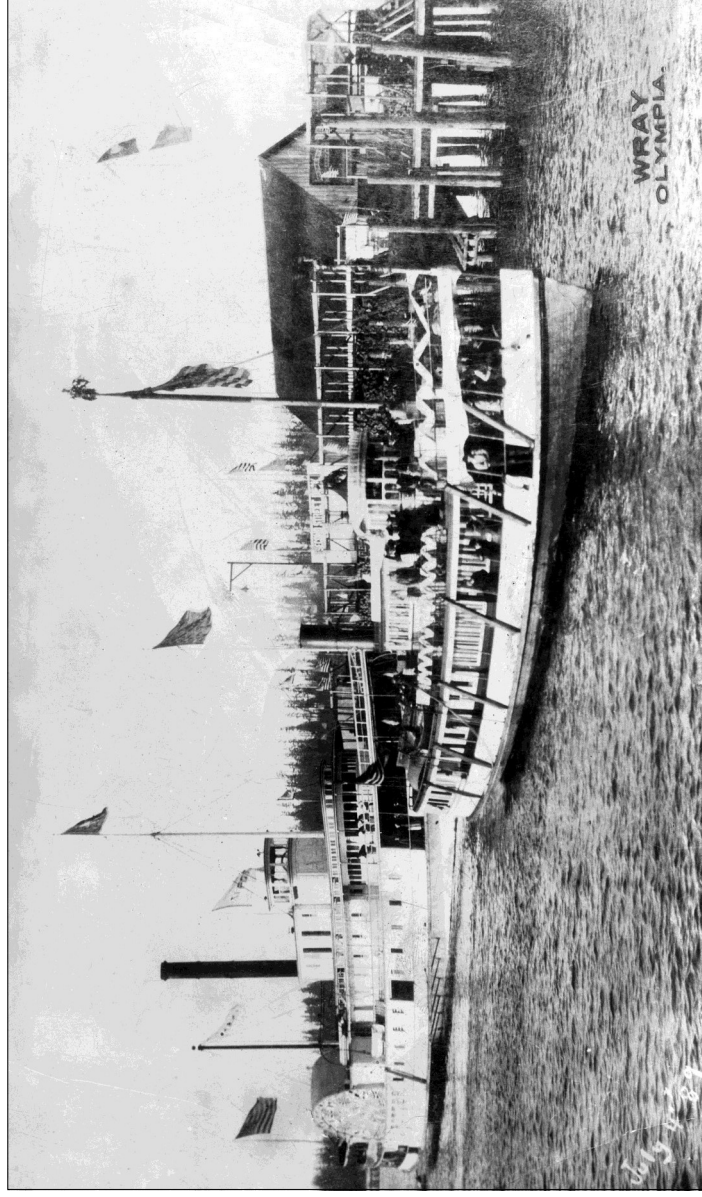
1830. His son, William Washington Fleetwood, was born in Monroe County, Indiana in 1850. William's brothers, Asa and David Fleetwood, were also born in Monroe County; Asa in 1854 and David in 1855. Shadrick lived in Scotland County, Missouri in 1860. Another of his sons, James Marion Fleetwood, was born at Oregon City, Linn County, Oregon in 1867. By 1870, Shadrick and his family were residing in the Puyallup Valley of Pierce County, Washington. All of them had moved to Thurston County by the time the 1880 Washington census was taken. Shadrick Fleetwood died in 1884 and was buried (as "Chadrick" Fleetwood) at the Ruddell Pioneer Cemetery, located at the intersection of Ruddell and Mullen Roads.¹³

Lyman Albert Fleetwood, DDS, was a grandson of David Fleetwood. Before Lyman passed away in 2009, he was interviewed by local historian Amber Raney. She questioned him about a possible link between the Fleetwood family and the name chosen for the Olympia telephone exchange. Lyman noted that his family had had no special relationship with the telephone company, and the name did not memorialize any of his ancestors.¹⁴

Those who are familiar with local maritime history may recall that S.S. *Fleetwood* was part of the Puget Sound mosquito fleet. That steamship

provided Thurston County with reliable transportation in the late 19th Century. Built in Portland, Oregon in 1881, S.S. *Fleetwood* operated between Astoria and various Columbia River ports during its early years of service. The ship was sold, and brought to Puget Sound in 1888, where it made a daily round trip between Olympia and Seattle. Later it was placed on the Tacoma-Seattle route.¹⁵ No credible evidence has been found to suggest a linkage between S.S. *Fleetwood* and the Fleetwood telephone exchange.

Fleetwood first appeared as the Olym-



S.S. Fleetwood (foreground) and S.S. T.J. Potter (background) steaming in to Percival Dock in Olympia on July 4, 1889. Photo courtesy of Washington State Historical Society. www.washingtonhistory.org/collections/item.aspx?irn=141012 (accessed September 1, 2019).



In 1898, the S.S. Fleetwood was abandoned on Vashon Island. This view from 1908 shows the ship wrecked on the beach at Quartermaster Harbor. Photo by Asahel Curtis, courtesy of Washington State Historical Society. www.washingtonhistory.org/collections/item.aspx?im=148720 (accessed September 1, 2019).

pia exchange name in the 1955 telephone directory; it remained in use through the 1961 issue. Fleetwood was no longer used in the 1962 and later directories. Prior to 1955, Olympia was already using 352 and 357 as the initial digits in some of its local telephone numbers.

AT&T published *Notes On Nationwide Dialing* in 1955. It contained a list of names that were recommended for exchanges, in order to minimize the chance of misunderstanding when the name was spoken. The list was to be

applied to new exchanges only. Existing ones would not be altered. For the initial number 35, the list included Fleetwood (as well as ELgin, ELliot, ELmwood, and FLanders).¹⁶

The building at 119 7th Avenue SE, in Olympia, was constructed circa 1938 to serve as offices for the Pacific Telephone & Telegraph Company. Located on the south side of 7th Avenue, across from Sylvester Park, it became known as the Fleetwood Building when Fleetwood was adopted as the name for the

Olympia exchange.¹⁷ It continues to be known as such. Currently, it provides low income housing.

Thus, it seems that the name Fleetwood has been a significant part of Thurston County history for many, many decades. Nonetheless, the only direct historical connection of The Fleetwoods is with the fleeting Fleetwood telephone exchange.

NOTES

¹ Holly Reed. March 30, 2019, "Following in the Footsteps of Famous Musicians Who Lived in Olympia." www.thurstontalk.com/2019/03/30/following-in-the-footsteps-of-famous-musicians-who-lived-in-olympia/ (accessed September 1, 2019).

² Howard A. DeWitt, "The Fleetwoods-then and now: Teen Angst and Soft Rock 'n Roll." www.thefleetwoods.us/biographies/the-fleetwoods-then-and-now.html (accessed September 1, 2019).

³ Fred Bronson. April 13, 2019, "The Fleetwoods' Gretchen Christopher Reflects on Toppling the Hot 100 60 Years Ago Today." www.billboard.com/articles/columns/pop/8506925/the-fleetwoods-gretchen-christopher-come-softly

-to-me (accessed September 1, 2019).

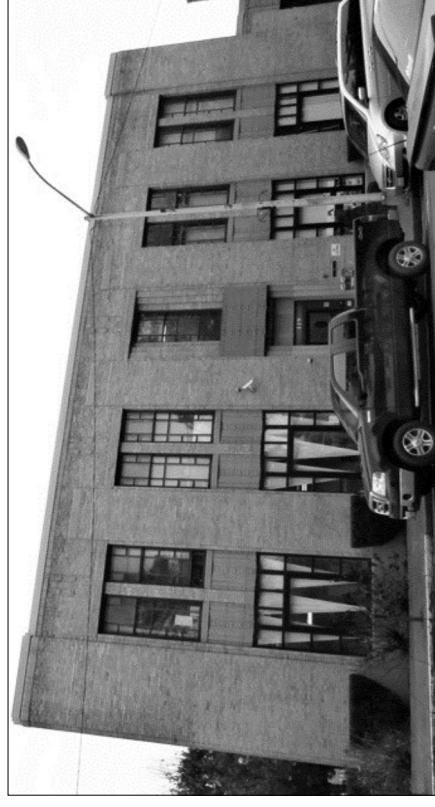
⁴ Michael Jack Kirby. "The Fleetwoods." From Way Back Attack. www.waybackattack.com/fleetwoods.html (accessed September 1, 2019).

⁵ "The Fleetwoods Today." www.thefleetwoods.com/fleetwoodsbio.html (accessed September 1, 2019). The replacement groups were also called The Fleetwoods.

⁶ Howard A. DeWitt.

⁷ Fleetwood Mac. www.rockhall.com/inductees/fleetwood-mac?gclid=CjwKCAiAvonyBRB7EiwAadau-qXa7x5oN_qtZzn2jxLVlrWhfFN_pSpvJA tazd1Hvyv0YpIUDsxnnTB0CDAQQA VD_BwE (accessed February 11, 2020).

⁸ "The Fleetwoods." History of Rock. www.history-of-rock.com/fleetwoods.htm (accessed September 1,



The Fleetwood Building at 119 7th Avenue SE in Olympia. Photo courtesy of Deb Ross (2013), Fleetwood Building. <https://olympiahistory.org/fleetwood-building/> (accessed September 1, 2019).

2019).

⁹ Nick Greene, “Why Did Old Phone Numbers Start With Letters?” *Mental Floss*. www.mentalfloss.com/article/61116/why-did-old-phone-numbers-start-letters (accessed February 11, 2020).

¹⁰ Dick Parker’s now-demolished roadhouse was located at 17001 Aurora Avenue North, in Seattle. Casey McNerthney, “Parker’s Ballroom, longtime north end dance hall, demolished.” *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, December 9, 2012. Bobby Darin (1936–1973) was a singer, songwriter, and actor popular in the 1950s and 1960s. Sally Hammond, “Bobby Darin’s Regards to Broadway.” *The New York Post*, September 30, 1967.

¹¹ Fred Bronson.

¹² Fleetwood Building. Olympia Historical Society and Bigelow House Museum. www.olympiahistory.org/fleetwood-building/ (accessed September 1, 2019).

¹³ FamilySearch. www.familysearch.org/search/ (accessed September 1, 2019).

¹⁴ Personal email from Amber Raney (received August 29, 2019).

¹⁵ E. W. Wright, *Lewis & Dryden’s Marine History of the Pacific Northwest*. Portland, Oregon: Lewis & Dryden, 1895, pages 284, 292, 336. www.archive.org/details/cihm_16505/page/

n1/mode/2up (accessed February 11, 2020).

¹⁶ “List of Suitable Central Office Names,” *Notes on Nationwide Dialing*. American Telephone and Telegraph Company, Department of Operation and Engineering, 1955, Section II, Appendix A, page 1. www.explodingthephone.com/hoppdocs/nonond1955.pdf (accessed February 11, 2020).

¹⁷ Fleetwood Building.

Dr. Hannum is a retired physician and surgeon who spent his early years in Michigan. He arrived in western Washington in 1971 as a member of the U.S. Public Health Service. Railroad history has been a life-long interest, and he has written several books on the subject.